

The
BALKAN SLAVS
in America and Abroad



An address delivered

By

Alexander Grau Wandmayer

formerly Commissioner Plenipotentiary of the Ukrainian Government
with the International Commission for the
Liquidation of Austria

before students of racial backgrounds
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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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I have been invited to speak on Balkan Slav life and culture, a subject on which information is not readily obtainable in books or other publications. It has also been suggested that I omit politics and history—an extremely difficult task. We are living in an age of print and communication, and no writer, speaker or student who believes that his observations and speculations are original, can be sure that the very thing he may say, has not previously been observed and said by others. Moreover, it is no less difficult to speak of the life and culture of races and nations, without alluding, at least, to their history and political life. Is not the character of a race or a nation the product of its history and the nature of its soil? And is not national character influenced by politics? Has the world at large any fair idea as to what extent Prussia was influenced by the political ideals and teachings of Treitschke, Fichte, Bismarck, or List? Or, to use a better illustration: compare English life and culture under Victoria, with English life and customs under Cromwell!

Balkan Slav life, social attitude, habits, folk-lore and music were and are, to this day so interwoven with politics, that it is almost impossible to draw an accurate picture of these nations and races without touching upon their historical past and the political atmosphere prevailing in those countries today. The rough and changeable climate of the Balkan mountains; and the prolific soil which, nevertheless, is tillable only with great effort, in some parts of those wonderful and wildly romantic regions, have been instrumental in rearing and nurturing of races as hard and tenacious as their rocky native hills. The Balkan Slavs have been for centuries the puppets of Turkish, Magyar and Russian intrigues; for centuries they have been oppressed by the Turk, and often decimated by merciless invaders. Yet it was their great cohesiveness and unyielding character which enabled them to withstand unspeakable cruelties and to escape extermination.

The Balkan Slavs represent the most remarkable racial blending, and it was this blend of various Indo-European and Asiatic

tribes, that imprinted upon the Balkan Slavs many unsympathetic as well as many admirable traits. To the students of ethnography, the Balkan is a very interesting field, indeed; and it is amazing that many a traveler—ignorant of the language of these various races, their habits, characteristics and aspirations, past and present—undertakes to write books and articles on these peoples. Such travelers often come to the Balkans with preconceived opinions, according to their political affiliations, and—consequently—their views are either pregnant with contempt or undue praise and admiration.

We must bear in mind that the Balkan Slavs, in spite of their continual gravitation toward European and, particularly, Western civilisation, are intrinsically Orientals. Above all, it is Byzantine culture, the Greek Oriental Church, which has left to this day its deep imprint on the minds of the Balkan Slavs whose language is Slavonic, although a very considerable number of them are of Mongolo-Tatar origin. It would lead too far to go into the history of the Balkan races, particularly as this is not the object of this paper. My purpose is to answer the following questions:

- (1) Who are those immigrants who come here in such large numbers from the Balkans, and whom we know as Balkan Slavs?
- (2) What is their actual or potential contribution to American culture and the enrichment of American life?
- (3) What are the qualities and characteristics that prevent their adjustment to American life?
- (4) What are the conditions which now interfere with an intelligent appreciation of the Balkan Slav group in the United States?
- (5) What, therefore, should constitute the emphasis in the educational program outlined for them?

I shall have to speak, then, of Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Bosniaks, Bulgars, Herzegovinians, Montenegrins, Roumanians and Dalmatians, although all these races and nations are not the only inhabitants of that Eastern portion of Europe known as the Balkan Peninsula. Apart from the nations above mentioned, there are also Turks, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Albanians, Gypsies, and other tribes in the Balkan, though—with the ex-

ception of the great percentage of Turks—their number is negligible.

I shall not attempt to vouch for the exactness of the various population statistics given below.

The country known today as Jugo-Slavia, or the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, has a population of about 14,000,000 and is composed of Serbia, Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Istria, Montenegro and a large part of former Hungary.

We see, therefore, that the country embodies a mixture of races and nationalities, united by one common language (although the Slovenian idiom slightly differs from the Serbian or Croatian). There is, however, a prominent cultural distinction between Serbs and Croats, Dalmatians and Slovenes. The Serbs have a more Byzantinian culture; they are all members of the Greek-Orthodox Church, and they write and print with the characters of the old Slavonic or Cyrillic alphabet. The Croatians, Slovenians and Dalmatians, on the other hand, are Roman Catholics, and have used the Latin alphabet for centuries. But almost all races of the Jugo-Slavia of today seem to be of the same stock. In general, they are tall and nimble, with well-shaped heads, oval faces, and of light complexion. They are buoyant, vivacious and intelligent.

This cannot be said of the Bulgarians and Roumanians who are generally short, sturdy, and of swarthy complexion. Their skulls are short, thick, and strong, and they are of rugged health and strength. Therefore, speaking of a person of endurance and perseverance, the Greek will say: "This man has a Bulgarian head." The chin and the mouth of the Bulgarians and Roumanians are generally large and strong, and the Bulgarians are often recognized by their strong features, that is, their long and straight noses. The population of Bulgaria is about 6,000,000, while that of Greater Roumania, to which under the Treaty of St. Germain was allotted all of the Dobrudja, Transylvania, Bucovina and Bessarabia, amounts to nearly 18,000,000.

While it is true that the Roumanians claim to be the descendants of Roman Colonists (Dacia was a penal colony of the Roman Empire), the influence of Slavic blood was so strong, that it is

often very difficult to distinguish between the Roumanian and the Bulgarian. There is also a great number of fair Bulgarians, particularly in the North of Bulgaria.

All the races of the Balkan have in common: admirably developed muscles, fit for the hardest work; self-sufficiency and obstinacy. Serbians, Croatians and Dalmatians or Montenegrins are quick-tempered and passionate; the Bulgar and Roumanian, again, slow and phlegmatic and obdurate. The Roumanian is fond of good living; the Bulgarian, on the other hand, is modest; but all of them, Roumanians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Montenegrins or Slovenes alike, are political beings so to speak, and all are ready to fight and die for their political ideals or for a strip of land.

Another feature common to all the Balkan races, is their suspicious nature and a constant mistrust. Their thrift is so great as to approach the brink of avarice. All of them are talkative, very proud and boisterous. Their intelligence and natural gift for foreign languages is comparable only with the similar aptitude of educated Poles and Russians.

The natural resources of the Balkans are very rich. There are ore deposits, extensive forests, fertile soil. Yet, numerous districts of the Balkan are extremely poor, owing to their mountainous character, viz.: Herzegovina, Montenegro and Dalmatia; and the poor population of these regions generally emigrate.

The Dalmatians belong to the oldest Slavonic immigrants in this country. They are great sailors and they have settled here largely in the so-called maritime States.

Dalmatia, as has been said, is a poor country, one of Nature's step-children, and has been systematically impoverished by Austria for more than a century.

In literature the Balkan Slavs have not accomplished much. Early Jugo-Slav literature is mainly of a religious type, produced under the Serbian Czars in the fourteenth century. After the disaster of Kossovo, in 1389, and the Turkish conquests, Slavonic culture seemed to be doomed. In fact, from then until the nineteenth century, nothing has been written: folk-songs and poems were transmitted orally.

The great majority of the Balkan Slavs consist of peasants, and all are very democratic. There is no nobility; but the peasant

land-owner feels like an aristocrat, and is therefore, possessed of considerable self-reliance. All are diligent and religious; they have much respect for authority, and love family life. Divorce is almost unknown in the Balkan. While it is true that the Balkan Slav woman is not always considered as the foremost person in the family, the stranger who would dare molest the wife, sister or daughter of a Balkan Slav, would be roughly dealt with.

Of course, there were sad exceptions under Austro-Magyar domination, when public houses were openly maintained and the proceeds of the business of shame divided between the keepers of those houses and the police. But such exceptions exist even in highly civilized countries.

Owing to the parsimonious inclination of the Balkan Slav, the extensive hospitality practised in other Slavic countries is not much in evidence in the Balkan, but the general attitude toward friends is not ungenerous.

The village woman is completely defenceless before her husband or the elder of the family. A young girl is rarely permitted to marry for love. Material considerations form the basis of marriage. But the Balkan is coming abreast of the times, and the woman of today employs not only her muscular strength, but her mental faculties as well. We find today, in Jugo-Slavia and in Bulgaria, many intellectual women—physicians, school teachers and office workers.

There is a great local field for the improvement of public institutions and hygienic conditions, and a vast number of intellectual workers is required.

In many cases, particularly in the cities, the Balkan woman of today is not content with a professional career. She also takes an active part in politics and in the social struggle.

There are not many industrial establishments, except primitive domestic industry. Generally speaking, the inhabitants of the Balkan are farmers. The Bulgarians breed sheep, the Serbs hogs, and all of them have a pronounced ability of acquiring money. The educated classes are now journalists, or lawyers, or teachers; and if there is war, they all turn soldiers.

All the Balkan races are very fond of music. Their melodies

and musical motifs are often used by European composers of musical comedies. The women have great skill, and show good taste in making embroideries. The so-called Bulgarian embroidery is often admired in this country.

The Balkan nations are also great dancers. Their summer picnics and other out-door socials are charming affairs. There we find beautiful girls, their hair adorned with flowers, dressed in sleeveless embroidered blouses. Outside of the villages they build a bonfire, sitting around it and singing national songs. Soon they are joined by young men in their best attire, with daggers in their wide belts, and the girls at once arise and refuse to sit down again until their male friends request them to do so. And again they begin to sing, this time in the form of questions and answers. And then they dance the so-called "Kolo" (all around the fire). The men behave well, and no ill-chosen word is allowed to destroy the delicate procedure of love-making. After the dance the girls pin their flowers to their wooers' breast as a token of affection.

The moral standard is exemplary. And the simple, mostly out-door life led by the Balkan Slavs, accounts for their good health and longevity. Centenarians are not rare in the Balkan. Families with 12 to 14 children are by no means unusual. Formerly, newly married couples used to live and work on the farm of the bridegroom's parents, but in later years this practice has been abandoned. Conditions became too crowded. If the young scion of a large family is studiously inclined, the family will save for years in order to enable the ambitious child to obtain a higher education. If the student enters one of the professions, the whole family—of course—shares in the glory.

Balkan proverbs are very characteristic. For instance: "You cannot extinguish fire with straw."—"There are no heroes without wounds."—"The vineyard needs not prayer, but the spade."—"The Amen cannot be cashed."—"He who chases two hares, will not catch any."—"The angry buyer has empty pockets."—"He who drinks on credit becomes doubly intoxicated."—"Health without money is the worst disease."—"A word does not make a hole."

Or such proverbs in rhyme:

“Death destroys—exterminates,
Hath for nobody regard.
With death, life slowly exfoliates,
Against death there is no guard.

Everyone from near and far,
And dear to our loving heart,
If called before the eternal bar:
Forever he then must part.”

This, of course, is only a very faint and incomplete picture of the Balkan Slavs at home. We shall now proceed to the question:

What is the actual or potential contribution of these nations to American culture and the enrichment of American life?

Unless we are prepared to admit that wealth is the basis of civilization and culture, there can be no speculation as to the value and desirability of these peoples in our midst.

They are the producers of wealth, and without wealth there is no civilization.

Their actual contribution to American civilization is hard work, performed with pride and enthusiasm. America always needs hard-thinking and hard-working men and women. The native American of today is over-specialized. We have too many experts, drawing high salaries in return for a few hours' service. We have highly over-paid experts in corporation law, psychology and medicine; we have hairdressing, manicuring and finger-print experts, and what not. And, as a consequence, we often run short of everything, and if it were not for the strong muscles of those people from the Balkan, we might revert to barbarity.

The very basis of our life is agriculture! Now, these people from the Balkan are skilled farmers and horticulturists. They are experts in gardening; they are mining our coal, and forging our iron and steel. The people of Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Lackawanna and Gary, Indiana, can tell us what the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes mean to America, and all the steamship companies appreciate the value of the Dalmatian longshoremen to the shipping business.

Now-a-days, coal, steel and iron are essential to our very existence. These are the basic industries, without which our life

would be wretched and miserable. The Balkan Slavs are mostly represented in these basic industries. It was due chiefly to their great exertion that the war was won by the Allies. Shortage of coal, steel and iron is responsible for Russia's debacle. Russia had twenty million fighting men, but owing to the break-down of her rolling stock and the impossibility to replace it, Russia nearly perished. Without sufficient coal and steel, that is rolling stock, New York would starve and not a single house could be built. And if all of us enjoy a fair degree of comfort, we are indebted above all to the strong and sound muscles of the Balkan Slavs and their great endurance.

Without the hard toil of these people, Andrew Carnegie might have died a telegraph operator and America could not boast of magnificent libraries and other foundations for the advancement of science; and only he who is cognizant of these facts, can grasp the extent of the actual or potential contribution by the Balkan Slav to American culture and the enrichment of American life.

The moral qualities and artistic nature of the Balkan Slav have been mentioned before.

There is a great difference of opinion regarding the effects (moral, social and economic) of immigration upon American standards of living. However, a comprehensive inquiry of the United States Immigration Commission into the antecedents of workers in the mines and manufacturing establishments has shown that more than 50% are of foreign birth, and that thirty-seven of the fifty-six distinct races employed, came from the South and East of Europe.

It has been said that immigrants from Southern Europe are on the lowest level of the industrial scale. Personally, I do not consider railroad repairs, done chiefly by Croats and Slovenes, as the lowest level of the industrial scale. Of course, many thousands of newcomers have not had any industrial training and experience abroad, and can at first be employed only as common or unskilled laborers, but they are able and willing to learn, and after a year they are promoted to other tasks requiring skill and involving better pay.

It has been ascertained by the Immigration Commission after

careful study, that approximately one tenth of all families investigated owned their homes and that the percentage of home owners among the native whites was less than half as large as among immigrants. Less than 6% of natives, and more than 10% of the foreign-born owned their homes. In the latter category the Slovenians ranked with more than 11%. However, we may assume that, owing to war prosperity, this figure has doubled.

As to the question:

“What are the qualities and characteristics of the Balkan Slavs, that prevent their adjustment to American life?”, I would say that no such qualities or characteristics exist. If they fail to adjust themselves to American life, it is because American society does not care for them; because America on the whole has no understanding for them; because they are considered by Americans as inferior races; because they are often without protection; because they are treated as outlaws; and because their life and health means less to the native American than the life and health of a dog. In the industrial centres, they are called Hunkies, Huns. They have no standing in the community and justice is often granted them with reluctance. The native American isolates himself from the immigrants as if they were afflicted with a contagious disease. There is no social intercourse between natives and these immigrants, and intermarriages are rare. And these deplorable conditions afford an opportunity for the most pernicious influences of criminal schemers, usurping for themselves the right to guide and direct the immigrant. From the representative of his native land down to the crooked lawyer and fake-banker, all prey upon the immigrant, and the worst influence is exerted by certain organs of the foreign language press which rarely finds a good word for American institutions, always pointing out the crimes committed in this country and never mentioning the many noble qualities, broadmindedness and natural sense of justice of the genuine American. This type of immigrant press has but one object: to control public opinion in immigrant localities; to give publicity to its unreliable banking and money-forwarding schemes; to secure deposits from immi-

grants without giving them sufficient security; and to supply the immigrants with foreign news of special interest.

This immigrant press is often subsidized and controlled by foreign Consuls and Legations and everything is done to prevent the immigrant's Americanization.

The same may be said of immigrant churches. Prior to the World War, Russia had comparatively few genuine Greek-Orthodox emigrants. Yet, no less than 800 priests and missionaries were supported in this country by the former Russian Holy Synod of St. Petersburg. There were so few real Russians in the United States that the Russian Church authorities, after erecting a magnificent Cathedral in Chicago, had to appoint a Jew trustee of the Church. This, of course, was done for political purposes—mere Pan-Slavistic propaganda. The same policy was pursued by the Magyars. The Hungarian Government subsidized Magyar churches in this country of less than ten members.

For the salvation of Croatian and Dalmatian souls, the Russian missionaries considered themselves as the only divine agents. Serbia, as a matter of fact, had only very few nationals in this country, and was too poor to support churches. Yet, a year after the creation of Jugo-Slavia, the Consul General of that country had to be sent home by our State Department, because he attempted, through corruption and intimidation, to secure control of a Croatian paper published in New York City.

These are the powerful agencies and characteristic phenomena which prevent the Balkan Slavs from adjusting themselves to American life. It is to be deeply regretted, that the native churches do little or nothing at all to promote fellowship of natives and foreigners, such as exists among the natives. The native churches are indifferent to immigrants, and their inaction is due to race prejudice and the alienation of the church from the poor laborer.

The Roman Catholic Church, the Knights of Columbus, the Y. M. C. A., are passing by a great opportunity for patriotic service in this regard. The conditions interfering with the intelligent understanding of the Balkan Slav group in the United States are the total lack of proper agencies, educational and

social institutions, which could acquaint Americans with these foreign groups; the amazing indifference of the native American to immigrants; and the recent galling propaganda of certain ultra-chauvinistic papers against immigrants in general, and the helpless, ignorant and friendless foreign element in particular.

Now, as there can be no difference of opinion in regard to a certain class of immigration being not only desirable, but of vital importance to this country, and as all of us realize that a constant influx of new blood and brawn is essential to the operation of mining, manufacturing, road building, gardening and farming enterprises, there remains the problem of selecting and Americanizing the immigrant. There can be no question that America has a right, yea, a sacred duty to determine who is to be admitted to these shores and who is to be rejected, not only because those admitted are liable to become a public charge, but also because they are apt to destroy Anglo-Saxon civilization and American ideals.

With this end in view, I believe our established agencies to be inadequate. Even under the present restrictive immigration law, on occasions where the S. S. Companies are rushing in their human freight in order not to exceed the quota permitted, it is impossible for the immigration authorities properly to sift that human material. Always predisposed toward sparing immigrants and their families trouble, so far as possible, the process of selection is naturally incomplete, and for that reason it will ultimately be necessary to establish Immigration Agencies in those European countries which are the principal labor supply centres for the United States. There, on the spot, the American Agency could not only make the preliminary examination of the prospective immigrant's health and mentality, but also ascertain the essential data with regard to his pedigree, his past moral behavior, in short: his record. Only in this manner shall we be able to exclude criminals and the insane.

As to the final question:

"What, then, should constitute the emphasis in the educational program outlined for them?", I should condense this program to a few words: Teach the immigrant English, and when he is able to follow you, instruct him in civic matters; remind him

constantly of his privileges and his duties towards this country. In this manner you will Americanize him. By learning English, he will emancipate himself from the pernicious influence of foreign agencies and from other pestilential factors. He will begin to appreciate clearly the difference between liberty and oppression, between democracy and autocracy, or criminal oligarchy. He will not blindly follow degenerate and corrupt demagogues, and he will learn to distinguish the legal from the illegal, the possible from the impossible.

Here is a wide field for patriotic work, for teachers and educators, and for all with good will toward this country.

The Inter-Racial Council has so far been engaged in collecting data and studying the immigrant, his life and attitude, and it is now time to begin constructive work through education and protection. In every community of this country where foreigners are settled, irrespective whether temporarily or permanently, the Inter-Racial Council should establish a branch office acting under the direction or advice of a central organization; and school teachers, city officials and other responsible persons should compose the committees in control of the branches of the Inter-Racial Council. Distinterested lawyers and district attorneys, should be invited to employ all possible means in the protection of the immigrant, irrespective of whether the law-breaker be an American or a fellow-countryman of the victim.

Foreigners coming here to toil without knowledge of the language of the country and of American institutions, are like mute children. They need guidance and protection. European administrations are paternal, their criminal procedure is inquisitive. Here we are supposed to govern and to protect ourselves. A victimized immigrant cannot understand why we are not always able to protect him, because he does not know anything about the constitutional guarantee accorded a defendant, nor is he aware that the whole burden of proof rests on the accuser. Again, it is not unusual for an immigrant to be convicted of crimes he never committed, because of his inability to follow the proceedings, while the absolutely incompetent Court interpreters are often called upon to interpret a language which is more foreign and unknown to them than the language of this country

is to the immigrant. In European countries, Court interpreters are educated people with legal training, while in this country these public servants are mainly drafted from quarters where no one would expect to find them.

During my many years' experience with foreigners, innumerable tragedies directly resulting from the immigrant's ignorance of English have come to my attention.

Familiarity with the language of this country will also open the immigrant's eyes and liberate him from his Consul's guardianship.

In conclusion, it may be of interest to mention where Balkan Slavs are located in this country, that is: in which States they are working and prospering.

Serbians, Croatians, Dalmatians, Montenegrins are to be found in larger groups in Montana, California, Washington, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Oregon, Iowa, Nevada, South Dakota, Ohio, and even in Kentucky; while Bulgarians in larger numbers have permanently or temporarily settled in the States of Washington, California, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan, West Virginia, Ohio, Nevada, Montana, Oregon, Wyoming, Wisconsin, Arkansas and Indiana.

Their principal occupations in this country are: mining (coal, ore and minerals), manufacturing of steel and iron; ranching; farming; gardening; shipping; repairing of roads; railroad and canal construction; and other work most essential to our well-being.

The Balkan Slavs are not congesting our cities, and though segregated in the industrial centres of this country, they can still be reached by those patriotic Americans who have a sympathetic understanding for the needs of the country, and who are willing to take part in educating and protecting the immigrant. Immigrant Aid Societies should be controlled only by Americans. Personally, I have no confidence in Aid Societies controlled and managed by foreigners or Americans of foreign birth, as too much foreign politics enters into such organizations. American citizens of foreign extraction should be consulted and trusted only after proof of their not being affiliated with foreign governments; of having no ambition to receive decorations from foreign

potentates; and of their work not being subsidized by foreign governments. Mingle with the foreigner, take an interest in him and his family, and you will see that he will soon trust you more than his own countrymen. If he still deals with the banker, notary public, steamship agent and others of his own nationality, it is because he is compelled to do so, his ignorance of English preventing him from applying to real American institutions.

Besides the teaching of English, social features (such as parties, dances, visiting, etc.) should be provided for. The immigrant should be brought into a close relationship of a personal and sympathetic nature, and he should be made to feel at home. If we accomplish this, we shall earn his gratitude and appreciation, and thus Americanize the immigrant.

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